

*Gutierrez Encourages Senate to Adopt Change that Furthers Health and Economic Security for All Americans*

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Media Contact: Rebecca Dreilinger (202) 225-8203

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**(Washington DC)** Today, U.S. Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL) supported the House in providing 11 million children with the health coverage they need, including children and pregnant woman who are legal immigrants in this country. During these tough economic times, as millions of hardworking Americans are faced with losing their jobs and health care, it is essential that the Senate also take up the bipartisan State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) without delay.

This bipartisan bill renews and improves SCHIP, providing health care coverage for 11 million children – preserving coverage for the 7 million children currently covered by SCHIP and extending coverage to 4 million uninsured children who are currently eligible for, but not enrolled in, SCHIP and Medicaid. The bill also gives states the option of covering legal immigrant children who have been here less than five years under SCHIP and Medicaid.

"Without this legislation, children with common, treatable conditions fall at risk of unnecessary and painful health problems," said Rep. Gutierrez. "An asthmatic child would have to wait five years for his inhaler; common allergies to food could result in illness or malnourishment; a baby's simple ear infection could result in loss of hearing; and a diabetic child could risk nerve damage or kidney disease down the road. This legislation represents the difference between a child's prospects for a healthy, productive life or failing to treat and prevent serious health conditions, often costing taxpayers much more in the long run. More than that, this legislation honors some of the most hardworking taxpayers among us: immigrants who make every effort to earn their citizenship — and who will soon become citizens — playing a vital role as part of the fabric of our nation."

The House passed this provision previously on August 1, 2007 as part of the Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act. The goal is to get this bipartisan children's health bill to President Obama's desk in his first few weeks in office.

Polls have shown that more than 80 percent of the American people support this bipartisan legislation – including large majorities of Democrats, Independents and Republicans.

SCHIP was created in 1997 to provide health care coverage for children in families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but not enough to afford private insurance, and has proved a successful, cost-effective program for providing health care.

The bill is fully paid-for by increasing the tobacco tax by 61 cents and by achieving savings through imposing restrictions on self-referral to physician-owned hospitals.

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